

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Pain medicine addiction: "All I wanted was more of the drug."



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"Max" was addicted to prescription drugs. The addiction slowly took over his life. (This story is based on the experiences of real people whose names have been changed.)



I got a prescription for Vicodin® when I hurt my back. I was supposed to take two pills twice a day. But I was worried that wouldn't be enough. I took a few more,

just to make sure it worked.

Vicodin® didn't just dull the pain. I really enjoyed how it made me feel. I could relax and worry less about my family and business. I also got really tired, though. I had to drag myself around some days.

When my prescription ran out, I got so sick. Even though it was December, I sweated like it was July. And my whole body was in pain, so much worse than my back pain. I was scared.

I started going to many different doctors to get more Vicodin® prescriptions. I'd lie and say I was in terrible pain—worse than what I actually felt. I needed more and more pills to feel OK—more than one doctor would ever prescribe to me. Then I'd fill the different prescriptions at different drug stores. Sometimes I'd drive for hours to find a store where they didn't know me. My wife was upset because I was ignoring our business. But I didn't want to do anything besides get more Vicodin®.

Then one day I was at a drugstore with my wife, and the pharmacist said she wouldn't fill my prescription. The computer records showed I had already bought a lot of Vicodin® in a short time at several different stores. I was ashamed I got caught. I was embarrassed my wife was there to see it. But I was even more scared of getting sick like I did the last time I ran out of the pills.

The pharmacist knew what I was thinking. She gave me and my wife the National Helpline telephone number—**1-800-662-HELP (4357)**. She said they could help me get treatment so I wouldn't need the Vicodin® anymore. She also told me what I didn't know—that there is medicine I can take to help with the sickness I felt when the drug was out of my system, and with the cravings I had for more.

If I had been alone, I would have thrown out the number and just tried to get another prescription filled somewhere else. But as soon as we got in the car my wife pulled out her cell phone and called the number. She told me I couldn't keep going on like this. I was angry, but I couldn't make her hang up. My wife is a tough woman. And she loves me.

The hotline referred me to a doctor that treats people who are addicted to pain medicines. The doctor put me on a medicine to help feel less sick and crave the drug less when I stop taking Vicodin®. I already feel a little better—I'm less achy, I'm thinking more clearly, and I'm more able to pay attention. I may have to stay on the medicine for a long time, but I'm no longer running around desperate to get more Vicodin®.